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# Methodiſtical Deceit;

A

# SERMON,

PREACHED IN THE

# PARISH CHURCH

Of St. MATTHEW, *Bethnal-Green*,

MIDDLESEX;

On the 29th of APRIL, 1770,

By HADDON SMITH,

CURATE of the ſaid CHURCH.

As watchful *Shepherds* tend their *fleecy* Care,
Seek greeneſt Paſtures, and the pureſt Air;
Recall th' Unwiſe and Negligent that ſtray,
And from the *Wolf* redeem the panting Prey,
So Chriſtian Paſtors ſhou'd protect and guide
The Flock, o'er which, as Guardians, they preſide.

MOORE.

Publiſhed at the Deſire of many who heard it.

LONDON:

Printed for H. TURPIN, Bookſeller, at the Golden Key, *St. John's-Street*, *Weſt Smithfield*.

M.D.CC.LXX.

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# DEDICATION.

To my WORTHY

## FRIENDS the PARISHIONERS

OF

## Saint MATTHEW, *Bethnal-Green.*

My Brethren,

WHEN I compoſed the following Sermon, I had not the leaſt Intention to Print it; it being drawn up and preached ſoley for *your* Uſe, with whom I am more immediately concern'd. The *occaſion* of it is well known to you all. It was, if poſſible, to take off any *bad Impreſſions* that might have been made upon

your Minds by the Diſcourſes of ſuch *enthuſiaſtical Preachers* as have been brought into our Church; who, you well know, have never fail'd to aſperſe the *parochial Clergy*, and to create *Prejudices* in the Minds of the inconſiderate; by inſinuating (in their *Methodiſtical Cant*) that the *true Goſpel* is not preached in the eſtabliſhed Church. With a view to wipe off ſuch *baſe* Aſperſions, and at the ſame Time to point out the *deceitful* Manner in which they handle the Word of God, the following Diſcourſe was delivered. And many of you, my Brethren, were pleaſed to teſtify your *Approbation* of it, and deſire of its Publication. Tho' ſome, who are particularly attached to *Methodiſt Preachers*, I am inform'd were much *diſpleaſed* at it. I have therefore ſent it abroad, rude and imperfect as it is, in hopes that ſuch of my Friends who favourably received it from the *Pulpit*, will have no Reaſon to alter their Sentiments, when they receive it from the *Preſs*. And alſo that thoſe who were *diſpleas'd* at it, may have an Opportunity to make what *Remarks* upon it they pleaſe. But if ſuch Perſons could be prevailed upon, for a Moment, to lay aſide Prejudice and Partiality; and for once in their Lives, give themſelves the Trouble of fairly *examining* what is ſaid; I think I might *then* venture to entertain ſome hopes

that

that this Sermon would not be entirely *loſt* upon them. But be that as it may. This I am ſure of, the Diſcourſe is *well meant*. And I ſincerely wiſh it may be of Service to every one who ſhall happen to peruſe it. Some little Alteration has been made in it ſince it was preached; and what was *then* ſuppreſſed for want of Time, is now inſerted at large. But ſhould any one be inclin'd to have a more favourable Opinion of *Methodiſm*, than to *believe* what he finds repreſented in the following Diſcourſe; I muſt beg leave to refer him, for the *Confirmation* of what I have advanced, not only to plain *Matters of Fact*, which happen every Day; but to an excellent Treatiſe intitled, the *Enthuſiaſm of Methodiſts and Papiſts compared*. In this truly valuable Performance, the venerable Author hath ſufficiently expoſed, from the Writings of the *Methodiſts*, what he very juſtly calls their *ſanctified Singularities*, *low Fooleries*, and *high Pretentions*. This excellent Treatiſe, I am perſuaded, is well worthy the Peruſal of every one. And, together with the learned Dr. *Free*'s Sermon of *Rules for the Diſcovery of falſe Prophets*, will, if any Thing can, be a moſt effectual Preſervative againſt the baneful Infection of the Enthuſiaſm of *Methodiſts*, *Papiſts*, and *Fanatics* of every Denomination. And let it be remembered as a Warning to us, that this

this Kingdom has already but *too much* experienced the fatal Effects of *Enthuſiaſm*; even ſo far as to the overthrow of the Church and State. But that this may never *again* be the Caſe, is the Prayer of one who profeſſes himſelf with the utmoſt Sincerity,

Your truly obliged and

faithful and devoted Servant,

HADDON SMITH.

# Methodiſtical Deceit;

## A

# SERMON,

PREACHED AT

St. MATTHEW, *Bethnal-Green.*

2 COR. iv. 2.

*Not walking in Craftineſs, nor handling the Word of God deceitfully.*

DID I not flatter myſelf, that I am before an Audience who are more deſirous of hearing the plain Truths of the *Goſpel*, than to have their Ears dinn'd continually with the abſtruſe Points of *Election* and *Reprobation* *; I ſhould be apt to

* Some Time before this Sermon was preached, a Methodiſt Preacher, in a Charity Sermon at BETHNAL-GREEN, ſtrongly maintained the Hypotheſis of Election and Reprobation.

imagine, that no Diſcourſe would be pleaſing to them, or look'd upon as agreeable to the Goſpel of Chriſt, but *that* only which is as little underſtood by the *Preacher* as by one of the *Lunatics* in Bedlam.

But I am perſuaded better Things of you, my Brethren. I know you will not think the *worſe* of a Diſcourſe, upon an important Subject, becauſe it is plain to be underſtood: as *ſuch*, I apprehend my following Diſcourſe to be. And as it is a Duty incumbent upon every *Clergyman*, to withſtand ſuch as falſely inſinuate, that the Doctrines of the *Goſpel* are not preached in the *eſtabliſhed Church*; which is the Caſe in almoſt every Charity Sermon that is preached by *Methodiſts*; ſo I hope, at a Time, when thro' this Artifice, *Conventicles* are ſet up in almoſt every Pariſh, and the Pariſhioners drawn from their reſpective *Pariſh Churches*, that a Diſcourſe upon the Deception of *Methodiſm*, will not be deem'd unſeaſonable. And tho' to oppoſe and confute the pernicious Tenets of *Enthuſiaſts* may, by ſome Perſons, be called *railing*; yet I ſhall not think myſelf obliged to *deſiſt* upon that account.

When ſome among us, in Oppoſition to the Chriſtian Church, maintain abſurd, vain, and deceitful Doctrines; and theſe are applauded as *Goſpel Truths!* it is high Time

Time for every ſerious Perſon to look about him, and endeavour to *defend the Faith* to the beſt of his Power.

I only wiſh that the *Clergy*, in general, would expoſe the dangerous Tenets of this *overbearing Sect*; but as it requires no great Capacity to ſhew the *Deceitfulneſs* of their Doctrines, ſo I ſhall make no Apology for attempting it. Your ſerious Attention then, to what I am going to ſay, may, thro' the Grace of God, be attended with ſome Advantage; as I intend to enlarge upon the Text in the following Manner.

Firſt, I ſhall ſhew, by ſeveral Inſtances, that a ſet of *pretended Reformers* among us, called *Methodiſts*, do *handle the Word of God deceitfully*.

Secondly, I ſhall point out the pernicious Conſequences of ſuch a *deceitful* dealing with the Word of God. And,

Thirdly and Laſtly, I ſhall cloſe all with a Word of Exhortation.

In the Firſt Place

ſeveral Inſtances, that a [illegible] *Reformers* among us, called *Methodiſts*, do *handle the Word of God deceitfully*.

The ſpecious Pretence of making a thorough *Reformation* in the Church, is the grand Engine by which *Enthuſiaſts* impoſe their *wild Vagaries* upon the ignorant Multitude. In order to this, they never fail to

inſinuate, that the *true Goſpel* is not preached in the eſtabliſhed Church. For as the Word *Goſpel* in Divinity, like *Liberty* in Politics, has ſomething intoxicating in the *ſound* of it to ſuch as know little of its genuine Signification, it is no difficult Taſk to perſuade *ſuch* People into a Belief of any Thing, however abſurd, or contradictory to Reaſon and Scripture.

And ſo prone is Human Nature to reliſh every Kind of *Defamation*, that a Diſcourſe well ſeaſoned with this Ingredient, is ſwallowed down with the greateſt Eagerneſs.

For this Reaſon it is, no doubt, that the *Methodiſt Preachers* are continually *fulminating* againſt the eſtabliſhed Clergy. They repreſent them as greatly *degenerated*; fearing *Man*, more than *God*; having only an *outward Character*; but no *inward Call* to the Miniſtry; nothing of the *Holy Spirit*. But an *Enthuſiaſt*, you will find, has more of the *Spirit* than all the Clergy put together; and therefore, to be ſure, he muſt have every Thing new Modell'd; and the ſtanding *Rules* of the *Church* muſt give way to every *wild Freak* that happens to ſpring from his heated Imagination.

*Human Learning* is ſure to be cried down as unneceſſary; becauſe the *Spirit*, they ſay, will *teach* them in that Hour what to Speak. Thus they vainly apply a *Text* of Scripture, that

that was evidently *peculiar* to the Apoſtles, to the Encouragement of every illiterate *Carman* or *Porter*, to ſet himſelf up as a *Preacher*, under the Pretence of *Inſpiration*.

And is not this to *handle the Word of God deceitfully?* Yes ſurely: Becauſe it is making a *Text* of Scripture bend to ſerve a particular Purpoſe.

I would not be underſtood to ſay, that God does not infuſe ſuch a meaſure of *Knowledge* into our Minds as he, in his great Wiſdom, ſees moſt *needful* for us; but only that we are not to neglect *Human Learning* under the groundleſs Notion that God will teach us ſupernaturally.

If by diligent Study, we endeavour to know and underſtand God's Holy Word, we need not doubt, but that by his Bleſſing, we ſhall attain to as much *inſight* into the Scriptures as will make us thoroughly furniſhed with every Qualification neceſſary for the Work of the Miniſtry. In the *Infancy* of the Church, there was a Neceſſity for *extraordinary Gifts*, in order to the firm Eſtabliſhment of Chriſtianity. But when that was done, the Almighty was pleaſed to withdraw theſe *extraordinary Gifts*, and leave Men to the *ordinary* Means of Study and Diſcipline, in order to qualify themſelves for the ſacred Function. And I am perſuaded, that were it not for

for our *Univerſities*, and other Schools of Learning, the Nation would ſoon be over-run with *Ignorance* and *Barbarity*; and, in a ſhort Time, we ſhould be as bad as we were in the Days of *Popery*.

By thus *depretiating* Human Learning it is, that theſe Men endeavour to undermine the Chriſtian Prieſthood. They bring it into diſrepute by *vilifying* the Parochial Clergy, and creating Prejudices in the Minds of their reſpective Pariſhioners. And tho' they may imagine their ſcandalous Abuſe of a lawful Prieſthood to be a Thing of no *great Moment*; yet when any ſerious Perſon conſiders, that the *Succeſs* of a Clergyman's Miniſtry depends, in a great Meaſure, upon the *good Opinion* his Pariſhioners have of him, they will eaſily perceive the *Wickedneſs* of ſuch Practices. And as the *Goſpel* no where *Countenances* ſuch a Behaviour; ſo it is evident that they *handle the Word of God deceitfully* in this Reſpect; becauſe they *Preach* it as the Word of God, when in Reality it is *not* ſo.

From *traducing* the lawful Miniſtry, they naturally proceed to *magnify* themſelves.

After recounting to you what *horrid Sinners* they have been, they tell you how *miraculouſly* they were *converted*. At *ſuch* a *Time*, and at ſuch a *particular Place*, they *felt* the Spirit ruſh in upon them, with ſuch *irreſiſtible*

*irreſiſtible* Force, that they were immediately tranſlated from the *Kingdom of Satan* into that of *Chriſt*. *This* they make the Mark of the *New-Birth*; and will allow none to be *regenerated*, but *ſuch* only as have, one Time or other, felt this extraordinary Operation.

But this is directly contrary to the *Scriptures*, which never direct any Man to expect ſuch *irreſiſtible* Grace. On the Contrary, they declare, that the *Grace* which God gives Mankind, in order to their *Converſion*, may be reſiſted; and, through a Man's own Perverſeneſs, may be made of *none Effect*.

And this is evident from thoſe Places in Scripture, in which God ſays, *What was there more to do for my Vineyard, which I have not done in it? Wherefore then, when I looked that it ſhould have brought forth Grapes, brought it forth wild Grapes?* Now does not this make it evident, that the *Grace* which God had given theſe *ſtiff-necked People* was *ſufficient* for their Converſion? And yet, notwithſtanding, you ſee, they *rejected* this Grace, and made it of *none Effect*. The ſame may be obſerved of the *Obſtinacy* of the *Jews*, when our Bleſſed Saviour *wept* over Jeruſalem. And alſo when he uttered that paſſionate Exclamation, *O! Jeruſalem, Jeruſalem, thou that killeſt the Prophets and ſtoneſt*

*ſtoneſt them which are ſent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy Children together, even as a Hen gathereth her Chickens under her Wings, and ye would not!* Matt. xxiii. 37. If they *would not* be gathered to him, is it not evident then, that they *reſiſted* the Grace of God? I imagine none of the Advocates for *irreſiſtible Grace* will be ſo hardy as to Charge our Bleſſed Saviour with *Inſincerity*, when he uttered ſuch a paſſionate Exclamation.

But further, if the *Grace* given to Men be *irreſiſtible*, why are they ſo often reproached with *turning their Backs*; *ſtopping their Ears*; *hardening their Hearts*; *quenching*, *grieving*, and doing *deſpite* to the *Holy Spirit? Ye ſtiff-necked and uncircumciſed in Heart and Ears*, ſays St. Stephen, *ye do always reſiſt the Holy Ghoſt*: *As your Fathers did, ſo alſo do ye.* Theſe are *plain* Paſſages of Scripture. And ſurely the *obſcure* Parts of it ought to be interpreted ſo as to make the *whole* conſiſtent with itſelf. When therefore the Doctrine of *irreſiſtible Grace* is preached up as it is, without taking Notice of *theſe* Texts of Scripture, what is this but to *handle the Word of God deceitfully?*

From *irreſiſtible Grace*, follows the Doctrine of *final Perſeverance*. *Nothing*, they ſay, *ſhall ever be able to ſeperate them from the Love of God in Chriſt Jeſus*; for "*once*

"a

"a Child of God, and *always* a Child of "God, was the Expreſſion of one in this "Pulpit."

That they who continue ſtedfaſt unto *Salvation*, do this by the *Power* of God through *Faith*; and that they who are thus preſerved, are preſerved by the *Grace of God* in Chriſt Jeſus, as being alone *able* to keep them, has never, that I know of, been *denied*; but that God hath promiſed to keep any Man from *wilfully* making *Shipwreck* of his Faith; or that the juſt Man, who lives by Faith, *can* never draw back to Perdition, is what we abſolutely deny; becauſe this is not a Doctrine of the Scriptures. Chriſt, indeed hath ſaid, that *he gives unto his Sheep eternal Life, and they ſhall never periſh, neither ſhall any pluck them out of his hand. For his Father which gave them to him, is greater than all: and none is able to pluck them out of his Father's hand.* John x. 28. 29. But if they *willfully* forſake him, God hath not promiſed to *keep* ſuch againſt their *Wills*. For that a Man may *willfully* forſake him, and through his own Fault, fall from Grace and die in his Sins, is the expreſs Doctrine of Scripture.

*When the Righteous turneth away from his Righteouſneſs and committeth Iniquity, and doth according to all the Abominations which the wicked Man doth, ſhall he Live? All his*

*Righteouſneſs that he hath done ſhall not be mentioned; in the Treſpaſs that he hath treſpaſſed, and in the Sin that he hath ſinned, in them ſhall he die.* Ezek. xviii. and 24th. And again in the *New Teſtament*, St. Paul ſays, *It is impoſſible for them who were once enlightened and have taſted the heavenly Gift, and were made Partakers of the Holy Ghoſt, and have taſted the good Word of God, and the Powers of the World to come, and yet fall away, to renew them again to Repentance.* Heb. vi. 4, 5, and 6th. And he ſays of himſelf, *I keep under my Body, and bring it into Subjection; leſt when I have preached to others, I myſelf, ſhould be caſt away.* 1 Cor. ix. and 27th. And ſurely, if ſo great an Apoſtle as *St. Paul*, who certainly had as much of the *Spirit* as any *Methodiſt* can boaſt of, declares it poſſible for *him* to be caſt away, is it not evident that there is none of *us*, but what may be caſt away? What words then, can more evidently make it appear, that the Doctrine of *final Perſeverance*, is a Doctrine *not* to be found in the Scriptures? And yet theſe are only a *few Texts* out of a vaſt Number, that may be produced to the *ſame* Purpoſe. Therefore thoſe who preach this Doctrine, and *paſs over* theſe and the like Texts of Scripture, in ſo doing, *handle the Word of God deceitfully.*

Again: They preſume to dive into the *ſecret Counſels* of God; and with the greateſt Poſitive-

Poſitiveneſs and Preſumption declare, that God hath made an *abſolute unconditional Decree*, that but a *certain Number* out of Mankind (all beheld in an equal Degree of Demerit) ſhall be *ſaved*: And the reſt ſhall be *damn'd*, without any Conſideration of what they *ſhall*, or *can* do. And that accordingly he gives ſo much *Grace* to ſome, that they cannot *miſs* of Heaven, and ſo *little* to others, that they cannot poſſibly *attain* it. A Doctrine! that throws the foulest Imputation of *Injuſtice* and *Partiality* upon the ſupreme Being that can poſſibly be imagin'd; ſupported only by *broken Fragments* of Scripture, without the leaſt regard to their *Contexts*, and many other *plain Paſſages* in the Bible!

When all the Places of Scripture, which mention any Thing of an *Election*, are taken in *one View*, and carefully compared with their *Contexts*, as they ought to be; it evidently appears, that the *Election* there mentioned, is not meant of *particular Perſons* elected to *eternal Life*; but of whole *Churches* and *Nations*, to be God's *peculiar* People; as the *Jews* were of old, and *Chriſtians* are now. And this I might eaſily make appear from the *Places* where any Thing of an *Election* is mentioned, did not the *Limits* of a Diſcourſe of this Nature, *ſtraighten* me in point of Time. But this is

ſo *clearly* done by the learned *Dr. Whitby*, that I may venture to ſay, that the warmeſt Advocates for *Predeſtination*, will never be able to anſwer him on this Point.

I ſhall, however, juſt take Notice of one or two of the moſt *material* Paſſages which are thought to *favour* this Doctrine. The firſt is, in the 28, and two following Verſes of the 8th Chapter of *St. Paul*'s Epiſtle to the *Romans*; and is as follows: *And we know that all Things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his Purpoſe. For whom he did foreknow, he alſo did predeſtinate to be conformed to the Image of his Son, that he might be the firſt born among many Brethren. Moreover, whom he did predeſtinate, them he alſo called: And whom he called, them he alſo juſtified; And whom he juſtified, them he alſo glorified.* An Eye tinged with the rigid *Predeſtinarian* Tenets, can read the whole Scheme of *Election* and *Reprobation*, in every *Word* of this Paragraph; and dream of *ſecret Purpoſes*, *hidden Wills*, and inward *efficacious Calls*; and what not? But an unprejudiced Perſon, who carefully examines the *whole Chapter*; and conſiders the *Connection* and *Drift* of the Paſſages in Queſtion, will eaſily find that they are fairly capable of a more *rational* Interpretation. The *Apoſtle* from the 11th Verſe, and onwards,

is

is evidently ſpeaking of the *Reſurrection of the Body*; and informs us who are thoſe that ſhall attain *eternal Life*, and who not. He encourages the *Chriſtians*, to whom he was then writing, patiently to endure their preſent Sufferings, from the Conſideration, that *all Things work together for good to them that love God*; and that their *light Afflictions* were not worthy to be compared to the *Glory* which ſhould be *revealed* in them at the Reſurrection of the Dead. He ſhews that this *preſent State of Suffering* is the *Way* to this Glory; that they ſhould be *delivered* in God's good Time, and comforted above all their Afflictions. He takes Notice, that they *hop'd* for this Deliverance, and *pray'd* for it: But in this Caſe, as well as in all others, the Spirit (ſays he) *helpeth our Infirmities; for we know not what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit maketh Interceſſion for the Saints, according to the Will of God*, who knows better than we ourſelves, what is good for us; and according to our *good Behaviour* under them, ſo ſhall we be glorious and happy hereafter. *For we know that all Things work together for good, to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his Purpoſe:* As the firſt Chriſtians were to a more than ordinary State of *Afflictions* and *Sufferings* for the Sake of the *Goſpel*, according to God's Purpoſe of

of placing thoſe in a *Poſt of Danger*, who, he foreknew, would be able to *ſtand* it. *And whom he did* thus *foreknow he alſo did predeſtinate to be conformed to the Image or likeneſs of his Son in his Sufferings, Death*, and *Reſurrection*; that he, (our Bleſſed Saviour) *might be the firſt born among many Brethren. Moreover, whom he did thus predeſtinate* (to ſuffer for the Goſpel at that Time) *them he alſo called to it; and whom he called*, he alſo, upon their good Behaviour, *juſtified*; i. e. acquitted, received into Favour; and whom he thus *juſtified* and *approved*, them he alſo *glorified*; i. e. glorified them before Men, as God did his Son, by approving their Works by Signs and Wonders, and Miracles; and will alſo *glorify* them in Heaven at the laſt Day. From all which, you ſee, there is Nothing that can *prove*, that there is an abſolute Determination of any Man to *Happineſs* or *Miſery*, without having the Power to *obtain* the one, or *avoid* the other.

The next Paſſage is to be found in the 9th of the *Romans*, 12th and 13th Verſes; and is as follows: *It was ſaid unto her, the Elder ſhall ſerve the Younger. As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Eſau have I hated.* Theſe two Words, *loved* and *hated*, it is ſaid relate to the future States of *Heaven* and *Hell*. But that they do not will appear from

from hence, that by *Jacob* and *Eſau*, is not meant their *particular Perſons*, but the *Nations* deſcended from them. For *Eſau* never ſerved *Jacob*, in his *own Perſon*, that we read of. But it is true of his *Poſterity*; for *Eſau*'s Poſterity, (which was the *Edomites*, ſprung from him) did ſerve the Poſterity of *Jacob*, (which was the *Jews*,) until at the Time foretold he ſhook his *Yoke* from him. And this is evident from the 23d Verſe of the 25th Chapter of *Geneſis*, from whence *St. Paul* quotes the Paſſage in Queſtion, and where *Rebecca* having enquired the Reaſon of the Children *ſtruggling* within her; ſhe was anſwer'd, *Two Nations are in thy Womb, and two Manner of People ſhall be ſeperated from thy Bowels, and the one People ſhall be ſtronger than the other, and the Elder ſhall ſerve the Younger.*

Since then, it is certain, that by *Jacob* and *Eſau*, is to be underſtood the *Nations* ſprung from them; ſo it is equally certain, that the Words, *loved* and *hated*, cannot ſignify that the *whole Nation* of the *Jews* were eternally *ſaved*, nor that the *whole Nation* of the *Edomites* were eternally damn'd. The *true* meaning, then, muſt be, that one Nation was appointed to *bear Rule* over the other in *this* Life, according to God's Purpoſe of *electing* the *Jews* to execute his Deſigns, and not the *Edomites*; not of

Works

Works (for one People was not better than another) but of God, who was pleaſed for his own ſecret Reaſons to call one his People and not the other. So that this Paſſage, it is clear, has nothing to do with the *eternal future State* of Men in the World to come.

There is *one* Paſſage more, in the 21ſt and two following Verſes of this 9th Chapter of the *Romans*, which is alſo brought to ſupport this Doctrine. The Words are theſe: *Hath not the Potter power over the Clay, of the ſame Lump, to make one Veſſel unto Honor, and another unto Diſhonor? What if God, willing to ſhew his Wrath, and to make his Power known, endured with much long-ſuffering the Veſſels of Wrath fitted to Deſtruction: And that he might make known the Riches of his Glory on the Veſſels of Mercy, which he had afore prepared unto Glory?* By *Veſſels* here, is not meant *ſingle Perſons*, as ſome imagine; but *whole Kingdoms* and *Nations*. And by *Honor* and *Diſhonor*, is not meant, eternal *Happineſs* or *Miſery*, but the *outward Privileges* which one Nation poſſeſſes above another in *this* World. That this is the *true* Meaning, you will ſee by only turning over to the 18th Chapter of *Jeremiah*, whence this Alluſion of the *Potter* is taken —There you will find, that *Jeremiah* was ſent down to a Potter's Houſe, whom

whom he ſaw *Work a Work upon the Wheels. And the Veſſel that he made of Clay was marred in his Hand; ſo he made it again another Veſſel, as ſeemed good to him. Then the Word of the Lord came to the Prophet ſaying, O! Houſe of Iſrael, cannot I do with you as this Potter? ſaith the Lord. Behold, as the Clay is in the Potter's Hand, ſo are ye in mine Hand, O! Houſe of Iſrael.* That is, as the *Potter* can with the Lump of Clay, make *Veſſels* for *Uſes* more or leſs honourable, ſo can the *Almighty* out of Mankind, make *Nations* with more or leſs *Privileges*; and as, when the *Veſſel* deſign'd for Honour is *marred* in the working, the *Potter* can make it into *another* Veſſel; ſo, when a Nation favoured with *extraordinary Privileges*, has rendered itſelf *unworthy* ſuch Honour, God can diſpoſe of it to leſs Advantage. And this Explication is confirm'd by the Verſes immediately following; where God ſays, *At what inſtant I ſhall ſpeak concerning a Kingdom to pluck up and pull down, and to deſtroy it: if that Nation againſt whom I have pronounced, turn from their Evil, I will repent of the Evil that I thought to do unto them. And at what inſtant I ſhall ſpeak concerning a Nation to build, and to plant it; if it do Evil in my Sight, that it obey not my Voice, then I will repent of the good wherewith I ſaid I would Benefit them.*

And now, ſince it evidently appears, that by *Veſſels* is meant *whole Nations*; and by *Honour* and *Diſhonour*, outward *Privileges* and *Advantages*; ſo it is equally evident, that the *Jews*, who enjoy'd the greateſt *temporal* Bleſſings, had long *ſinn'd* themſelves out of God's *favour*, who endured them with much *long-ſuffering*, 'till they became *Veſſels of Wrath fitted to Deſtruction*; at which Time, that he might make known his *Power*, he poured out his juſt Indignation upon them. And *then* it was that he made known the *Riches of his Glory on the Veſſels of his Mercy*, even the *Gentiles*, whom he call'd to be his *Church* and *People*, as he had before appointed. Thus have I taken Notice of the moſt *material* Paſſages, which are thought to contain this Doctrine of an abſolute *Predeſtination*; and have ſhewn, that they are capable of an Interpretation more agreeable to Reaſon, more conſiſtent with other plain Paſſages of Scripture, and more conſonant to the divine Attributes of Goodneſs, Mercy, and Juſtice.

But let it not be thought that I am here contradicting the 17*th Article* of our Church. That Article mentions nothing of an abſolute Determination of Men to *Happineſs* or *Miſery*, without any Regard to their *Actions*. And therefore, no Man is obliged to put a *Senſe* upon the Article contrary to the Scriptures.

Scriptures. And as thoſe who preach this Doctrine, do not examine *all* the Texts and Contexts of Scripture concerning it, they in this Reſpect, *handle the Word of God deceitfully.*

Again: To abridge the *Extent* of Chriſt's *Redemption*, is unſcriptural.

The Scriptures aſſert, that Chriſt died equally for *all* Men; that *as by the Offence of one Man Judgment came upon* all *Men to Condemnation; ſo by the Righteouſneſs of one Man, the free Gift came upon* all *Men to Juſtification.* But it may be objected, that in many Places it is not ſaid Chriſt gave his Life a Ranſom for *all*, but for *many*. So it is alſo ſaid, that by the Diſobedience of *Adam, many* were made Sinners; whereas it appears in other Places of Scripture, that *all* were made Sinners. And ſo, in the ſame Epiſtle where it is ſaid *Chriſt* bore the Sins of *many*, it is alſo expreſly ſaid, he taſted Death for *every* Man: ſo that there is no Inconſiſtency betwixt dying for *many*, and dying for *all*. Therefore taking Notice of *ſome* Texts to this Purpoſe, and not of *all*, is another Inſtance of *handling the Word of God deceitfully.*

Once more, their preaching *Faith* without *Works*, is without any Warrant from Scripture.

If *St. Paul* tells us, in one Place, *we are juſtified by Faith without the Deeds of the Law*, he tells us alſo, in another, that it is ſuch a Faith as *works by Love*. And *St. James*, in theſe very Words, tells us, that *by Works a Man is juſtified, and not by Faith only*. But if a Clergyman, who is not a profeſſed *Methodiſt*, ſpeaks any Thing of good Works (tho' he has the Authority of Scripture for ſo doing) they immediately inſinuate that he perſuades his Hearers to *Truſt* in their good Works for their Juſtification; which ſhews their Diſingenuity, and alſo that they *handle the Word of God deceitfully*.

The laſt particular which I ſhall mention at preſent, is that of their denying the *Freedom of Man's Will*; and aſſerting that God has not given him Power to refuſe the *Evil* and chuſe the *Good*. Whereas the Scriptures from the beginning to the end, do plainly declare a *Liberty of Choice* in every one. *Chuſe you this Day*, ſays *Joſhua* to the Children of *Iſrael*, *whom you will ſerve, whether the Gods which your Fathers ſerved, that were on the other Side of the Flood, or the Gods of the Amorites, in whoſe Land ye dwell: But as for me, and my Houſe, we will ſerve the Lord.* Joſh. xxiv. 15. Now if this does not imply a *Freedom of choice*, to what Purpoſe were they *offered* their choice?

Who-

*Whoſoever will*, ſays our *Saviour*, *let him take the Water of Life freely*. Rev. xxii. 27. If we may do this freely, ſurely this implies that we are under no *Reſtraint*, but have a *Liberty of choice*. Theſe are only a *few Texts*, out of many more that might be produced to this Purpoſe. When the *Methodiſts* paſs over ſuch Texts as theſe, then it is plain they *handle the Word of God deceitfully*.

To be ſure, it is the Doctrine of Scripture, and an *Article* of our *Church*, that without the *Holy Spirit* preventing us, we can do nothing; but this does not imply, but that God gives a ſufficient Portion of his *Spirit* to every Man, to enable him to chuſe that which is good. And if God *gives* it to every Man, then every Man muſt have it in his *Power* to turn to God if he will. But whoſoever does not put the *ſame Senſe* upon the *Articles* that they do, however contrary it may be to the Intention of the Compilers, why to be ſure, if they are *Clergymen*, they are *perjured*, as one had the *Aſſurance* to ſay, in this Pulpit; and, if *Laity*, they are not yet *regenerated*, and of Courſe not in a State of Salvation. Very charitable truly! But I ſhall now proceed to ſhew in the

Second Place, the pernicious Conſequences of thus *handling the Word of God deceitfully*.

In the Firſt Place, it hurts the *Credit* of Religion among thoſe who have little or no *Regard* for it; by expoſing it to the Scorn and

and Contempt of *Infidels* and *Deiſts*. For any one who has the Uſe of his *Reaſon* and a tolerable Share of *Underſtanding*, muſt perceive, that this *deceitful dealing* with the Word of God, is to make the *Chriſtian Religion* appear *ridiculous*; and is, in Effect, to *Burleſque it*.

So that when *Libertines* find Religion repreſented in ſuch a *deſpicable* Character, they imagine they have ſufficient Reaſon to juſtify their treating it with *Contempt*; and therefore imprudently fix that *Reproach* upon *Religion*, which is due only to the *Miſrepreſentation* of it. And however *wrong* it may be in them to do ſo, yet it cannot be denied but that they have had too much *Occaſion* for it; not only from the Church of *Rome*, but alſo from *Enthuſiaſts* of every Denomination.

The dark and confuſed Diſcourſes of an *Enthuſiaſt*, juſtifies the laughing at them; for no one can be ſerious in a *Farce*, or avoid ridiculing that which is in itſelf ridiculous.

Thus the Religion of Chriſt is *blaſphemed* by the Extravagance of thoſe, whoſe Religion, as an excellent *Writer* expreſſes it, "is but the *Spectre* of Religion murdered "by *Ignorance* and *Enthuſiaſm*."

And as this dark and blind Repreſentation of Religion ſubverts its *Credit* among thoſe

thoſe who have little or no *Regard* for it, ſo alſo it unhinges the *common Principles* of it among the unwary and injudicious; who are from hence led to reject the plain and *practical* Precepts of Chriſtianity, to follow after vain Deluſions; which feed them up with the fantaſtical Conceit of obtaining ſome extraordinary indwelling of the Spirit. Then they begin to run about from Place to Place, ſeeking after they cannot tell what; a mere *Ignis Fatuus*; always unſettled; ever *hearing, and never being able to come to the Knowledge of the Truth.*

And as ſuch People are ever fond of hearing ſomething *myſterious*, no Diſcourſes will pleaſe them but what *are* myſterious; and therefore it is certain, that they can make but *little* Progreſs in Chriſtian Knowledge. For ſuch Kind of Diſcourſes, any Man of tolerable Parts, and good *Aſſurance*, can eaſily accompliſh. There is no more neceſſary than to make *Scripture Phraſes* familiar, by very much *reading* the *Bible*, and very little *Underſtanding* it; and then to expreſs as violent *Affections*, and as great Vehemence of *Action* in the *Pronunciation* as is poſſible, and the Buſineſs is done. And as theſe Diſcourſes are conſtantly repeated, it is evident to any one, that thoſe who are fond of *hearing* them will, notwithſtanding, be very far from religious Improvement.

Indeed

Indeed, many *imagine* they improve; ſo *far* forſooth, as to ſet up *Preachers* themſelves. For ſeeing thoſe who are *unlearned*, hold forth an *Hour* together, tho' they cannot make head or tail of what they ſay, yet they think they muſt be *taught of God*, becauſe they were never *taught* at all. And when they have learned *thus* to hold forth themſelves, they immediately intrude into the *Prieſt's Office*, and imagine that *they* are likewiſe taught of God.

And as their Diſcourſes are made up of *Cant* and *Folly*; ſo the *Defence* of them is *reviling* and *abuſe*. For a *Truth* it is, that none deſpiſe thoſe who *differ* from them more than *Enthuſiaſts* do; which is a Demonſtration that they are very little *influenced* by the plain and *practical* Precepts of Chriſtianity. And tho' perhaps they may not be guilty of the groſſer Acts of *Immorality*; yet *ſpiritual Pride*, which is the diſtinguiſhing Mark of an *Enthuſiaſt*, is not leſs abominable.

Theſe are the pernicious Conſequences of *handling the Word of God deceitfully*; that it ſubverts the *Credit* of Religion, and hinders the *Efficacy* of it upon ſuch as might otherwiſe Experience its *ſalutary Effects* upon their *Lives* and *Actions*. It produces *ſpiritual Pride*; makes Men *conceited*; and prompts them to look upon every one elſe with an

*un-*

*uncharitable Eye*; and even to go ſo far as to pronounce Sentence of *Condemnation* upon their Neighbours, as if they knew for certain, what would be their final State hereafter.

There is nothing that I have ſaid, that is in the leaſt *exaggerated*; but is well known to be *fact*; and any one may be *convinced* of it, with a ſmall Degree of Obſervation. I ſhall now, in the

Third and laſt Place, cloſe all with a Word of Exhortation. Seeing then, that theſe Things are ſo: And that there ever *was*, and ever *will be*, *religious Deluſions* in this World, it highly becomes every one, who has any regard to his own *Peace* and *Happineſs*, both here and hereafter, to be upon his guard; and, by a conſtant Peruſal of the *Holy Scriptures*, to eſtabliſh his Faith upon a firm Foundation: And then he will not be *driven away by every Wind of Doctrine, and cunning Craftineſs of Men, whereby they lie in wait to deceive.*

And take it for an undoubted *Truth*, that thoſe who rack their Brains by prying into ſuch abſtruſe Points of Religion as the nice Hypotheſis of *Election* and *Reprobation*; God's eternal *Decrees*, and *Foreknowledge*, and the like; are only *doting about Queſtions and ſtrifes of Words, whereof cometh Envy, Strife, Railings, evil Surmiſings, and perverſe*